DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 116 138 CS 002 302

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TITLE A Training Program for Reading Supervisors.
PUB DATE 75
NOTE 14p.; Unpublished study prepared at the University of Manitoba, Faculty of Education

EDRS PRICE MF-$0.76 HC-$1.58 Plus Postage
DESCRIPTORS Elementary Education; *Reading Consultants; *Reading Instruction; Reading Programs; Supervisors; Supervisory Methods; *Supervisory Training; *Workshops

ABSTRACT

It is essential that everyone connected with the supervision of reading be trained so that a system of analyzing reading instruction can be effected. Based on the assumption that the most effective supervision occurs in a one-to-one situation, the training program presented in this document centers on a workshop on supervision with four specific components: preobservation conference, observation of the teaching behavior, strategy and analysis, and postobservation conference. This document describes the application of the workshop training to two different programs, one in a small rural school and one in a large urban elementary school. The feedback from these two school situations indicated that supervision is effective (1) when a supervisor, in a series of conferences, helps a teacher search for and attain common goals; (2) if the teaching episode is observed and analyzed according to the teacher's declared needs; and (3) if time is allocated for supervisory conferences. (JM)

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A TRAINING PROGRAM FOR READING SUPERVISORS

It is generally agreed that the main purpose of teacher supervision is the improvement of instruction. There is also general agreement that such improvement takes place when the supervisor is aware of various supervisory strategies and implements them within a given supervisory act. In spite of a number of publications related to the analysis of supervision, there is a scarcity of literature related specifically to the training of reading supervisors.

The reason may be that there is an assumption that a master's or doctoral degree in reading provides one automatically with skills essential to helping reading teachers change their instructional procedures. In a number of graduate courses in reading an assumption is made that there is an awareness regarding interpersonal relationships and a structure has been

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uncovered within which these relationships operate to facilitate desired instructional changes. The person is now believed to be also an expert in techniques of analyzing a reading lesson and in the methods by which teachers can change. Yet evidence shows that changes are not occurring (3) and that there is disagreement among teachers and reading supervisors as to procedures for implementing change (6).

The need for training reading supervisors is clear. And the ways by which a supervisor can be trained are equally evident. We know that one learns best by doing, by actually experiencing a learning situation. It seems obvious that it is when one is being supervised as well as when one is supervising, that the stresses operating are felt and the subtle and intricate interplay of interpersonal communications are recognized. The question then is, should these awarenesses not be developed before one goes into the field to supervise? We know that teaching can be analyzed into certain discrete parts and that it is the practice in teaching and in analyzing this teaching act that an awareness develops of the basic underlying skills (2). We also know that a system of communication such as a series of conferences centering on a particular teaching episode is effective in promoting instructional changes generally (1) and in reading specifically (4). Should not these skills and structure be developed before one supervises reading teachers?

The conclusion which can be drawn is that everyone connected with supervision of reading must be trained. It is through training that a system of analyzing reading instruction can be developed as well as abilities to discuss and promote changes. Through such training, confidence can be gained in observing instruction under varying circumstances and in extracting data for meaningful examination with the reading teacher. Such a system of training in supervision then has the potential of effecting desirable changes in reading instruction.

This paper describes such a training program, with subsequent application to a rural school district, and to a large urban elementary school. For purposes of this discussion, reference will be made to only one trainee. In conclusion, implications for a training program for reading supervisors on a wider scale are drawn.

TRAINING PROGRAM

The training of the reading supervisor was based on the assumption that the most effective supervision takes place during a one-to-one situation. It was also based on evidence from a recent study of supervision, indicating that teachers want to be observed, and helped during their actual teaching performance (3). If teaching is to be analyzed and discussed, then a system of communication is necessary, involving the teacher and supervisor in a series of conferences centering on a particular teaching episode. Thus, a workshop on supervision became the focal point of the training program with specific components: pre-observation conference, observation of the teaching behavior, strategy and analysis, and post-observation conference.

The trainee for this program was an experienced teacher who had specialized in reading and language arts at the doctoral level.

(a) Analysis of Teaching

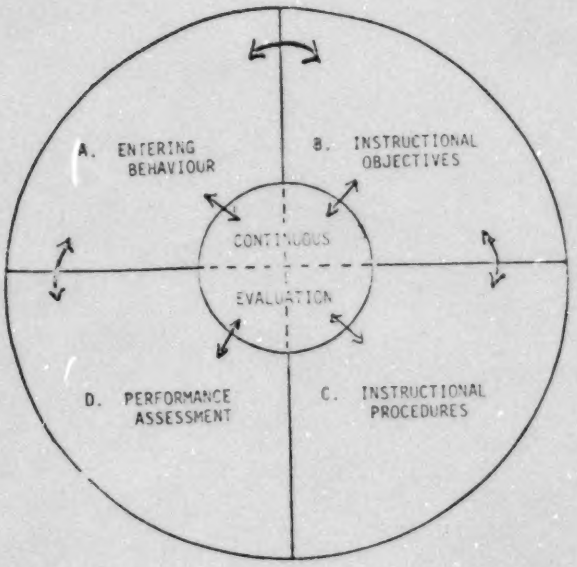
Because the pre- and post-observation conferences hinge on the examination of the teaching episode, the first part of the training program focussed on the analysis of teaching. This analysis was an integral part of a course in micro-teaching as developed by Hedley and Wood at the University of Manitoba (2). The course identified four basic skills which were practised and analyzed in peer-group situations: Exposition, Demonstration, Questioning and Discussion.

Through the exclusive use of one skill at a time in short teaching episodes, the trainees examined the common elements in the development of a topic. Since these episodes were video- or audio-taped, the trainees were able to view this development in conjunction with vocal, visual, kinesthetic

and structural emphasis. They began to be aware of personal strengths and weaknesses within these different teaching skills. This examination was refined and extended through discussions with the other participants who reacted from three points of view: as audience or learners during the presentation, as critics during the playback of the tape, and as teachers when each had his turn presenting. Having to comment on the performance of others gave each trainee the added practice in analyzing these skills in several different areas, thereby emphasizing that the four skills perform basically the same functions regardless of the content.

The benefits from the thirty-hour course were confidence in discussing more precisely the complex art of teaching reading and awareness that while each teacher makes his own combination of skills to suit his own style, the teaching can be analyzed into meaningful units. Further, by performing and analyzing, the supervisor-trainee began to <u>feel</u> the roles of the supervisor and of the teacher during a teaching situation. She began to recognize the stresses imposed on the observed and on the observer. Simultaneously, she recognized that both roles examine teaching from a set of common elements: objectives, entering behavior of the learners, instructional procedures, and continuous evaluation, and that these must be considered and integrated with the basic teaching skills.

For this reason, the following model became a base for discussions in the course: (see next page)



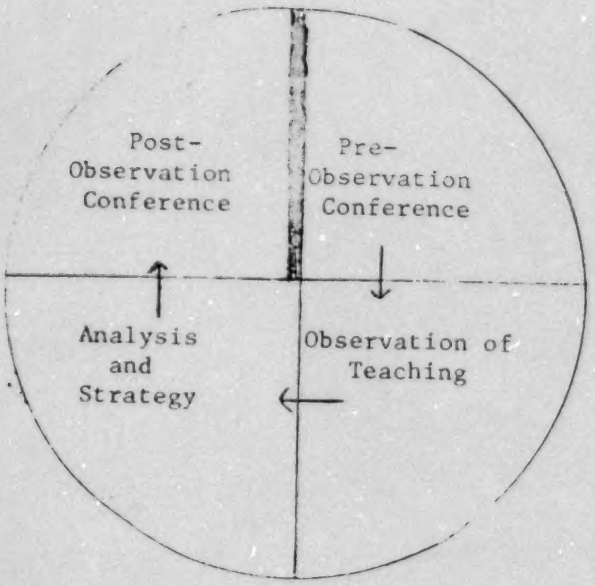
TEACHING STRATEGY

For example, an objective of a reading lesson may be the character of the hero. The fifth grade class, however, has had little experience in using their inferential skills to develop a character sketch. Thus the teacher introduces the lesson by recalling a personality who is well-known to all members of the class (Exposition). The character traits based on certain cited behaviors are elicited from the class (Questioning). They are then directed to read the selection and encouraged to produce evidence which becomes the basis for the character study (Discussion). The success of the lesson is judged by the number of character traits listed with appropriate supporting evidence from the reading material.

(b) Development of Supervisory Techniques.

Having achieved a certain degree of skill in examining the teaching act, the trainee was now ready for a larger structure aimed at using this skill in supervising reading teachers. This larger structure was studied in a thirty-hour workshop based on a modification of the Goldhammer model of supervision (1).

Four essential components were analyzed and practised: Pre-Observation Conference, Observation of Teaching, Analysis and Strategy, and Post-Observation Conference. These components constituted the supervisory system:



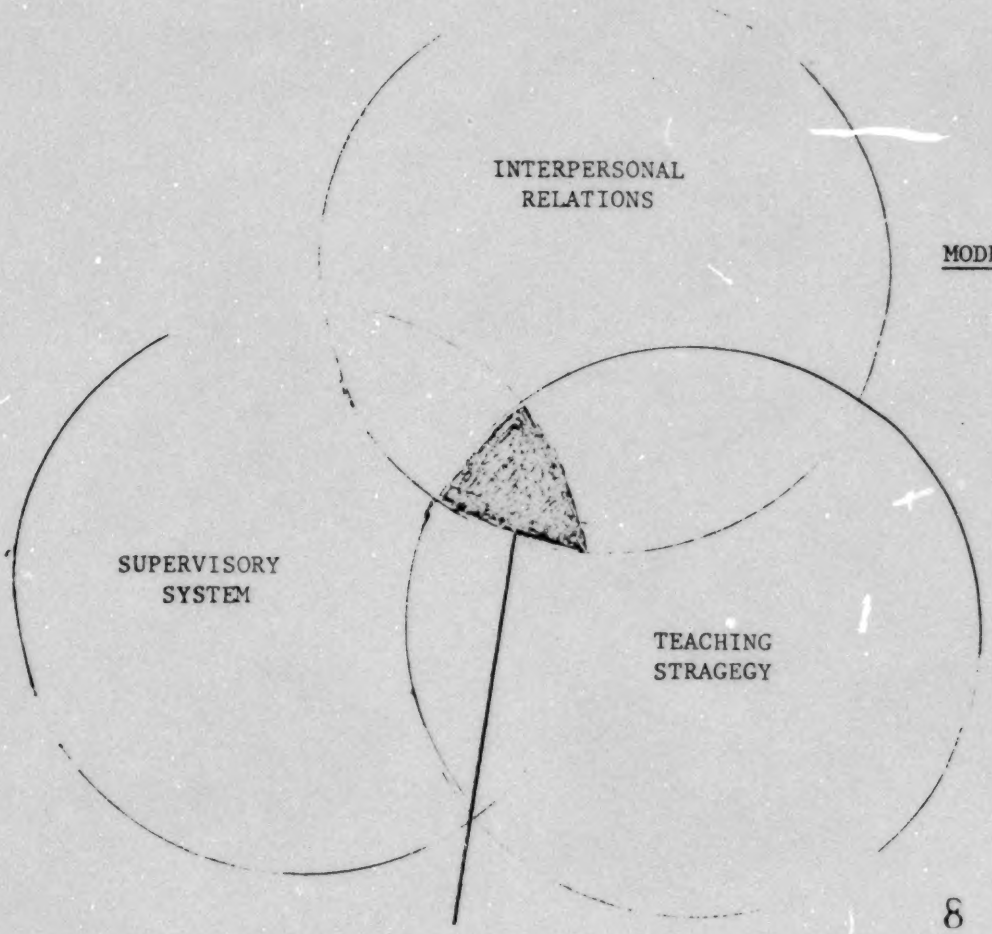
SUPERVISORY SYSTEM

The workshop was structured to emphasize the flow of supervisory skills within the cycle. While one participant was the teacher, another acted as the supervisor; together they practised the cycle before the rest of the participants. To bring into perspective the effect of interpersonal skills upon the communication between teacher and supervisor, a third person undertook the role of the observer or critic. His primary task was to observe and analyze the flow of supervisory skills from the affective point of view. Thus, each participant practised and analyzed the entire supervisory system from several positions: teacher, supervisor, observer and learner.

In the first stage of the system (Pre-Observation Conference), the supervisor and teacher were engaged in an active search for common goals and the gradual progress toward these goals through attention to a few salient and treatable aspects at that given time. Once the goals were mutually determined, they became the focal point in all subsequent discussions. The teacher then taught

and the supervisor observed and recorded according to those aspects agreed upon during the Pre-Observation Conference. The collected data were analyzed and organized into a system which was then presented to the teacher for discussion. For example, the teachers' questioning was one aspect examined in one cycle; the supervisor transcribed verbatim the questions and prepared the transcript for the teacher to examine. In the subsequent conference, (Post-Observation), the teacher and supervisor together looked over the data and discussed its relationship to the goals set during the Pre-Observation Conference.

Having participated in these two workshops, the trainee became fully aware of the stresses imposed by each role within the supervisory system. She was now more perceptive of the possible problems in communication and more confident in the ability to solve these problems. Using the following model as a guide,



MODEL FOR SUPERVISION

she felt able to observe the teaching of reading under any circumstances and to extract useful data for analysis. She became competent in discussing the planning of the lesson in a particular area of reading and in the observation and evaluation in relation to this plan. She also became adept at using more acts of soliciting and accepting of teacher's opinions, ideas and suggestions upon which to build and develop his instructional abilities.

The reading supervisor now felt she was ready to put this knowledge to practice.

APPLICATION

The first opportunity arose when a small rural school district asked for a part-time language arts supervisor with emphasis upon reading. At that time the district consisted of 140 elementary staff members of which there were 35 primary and 30 intermediate teachers.

The supervisor began the project, which was to operate for one year, with separate meetings for the two groups of elementary teachers: primary and intermediate. A one-day language arts workshop was organized for each group during which teachers' problems, previously identified on written questionnaires, were discussed. From this initial contact with the teachers, it became apparent that most of the problems centered around reading instruction. In spite of the fact that many of these problems seemed to be similar in nature (e.g., grouping, self-directed activities, phonic generalizations) application to the classroom must be related to the individual teacher's perception, hence discussions on a general basis were limited; another reason was that the teachers were hesitant in discussing their problems before a large group, especially one including administrators. Thus at the conclusion of each of these workshops, the teachers were informed that in the future the supervisor would be visiting the schools, and would be available to any teacher.

Once a schedule was devised and a few schools visited, a procedure was

established. Teachers met with the supervisor before classes were in session, and through these pre-observation conferences the teacher and supervisor discussed such aspects as objectives, learners' entering behaviors, instructional procedures and continuous evaluation. During this discussion, the teacher was encouraged to indicate wherein he had a problem and desired help from the supervisor. In the subsequent observation period, the supervisor gathered data relevant to the teacher's declared needs: teacher's questioning behavior during word recognition lessons, pupils' responses during reading comprehension activities, types of oral reading errors and development of specific study skills in a content area. Post-Observation Conferences were held immediately following the observed teaching episode; however, the time for supervisory analysis and strategy was limited, and, as a consequence, the Post-Observation Conference suffered.

It was understood that the school's schedule was not a limiting factor in the consultation program; the teachers could make use of the supervisor's services as their needs dictated. Consequently, the supervisor rendered services such as demonstration lessons; administration of informal reading inventories; making referrals to such personnel as medical doctors, school psychologists; helping in the planning of a parents' meeting to discuss the reorganization of classes; aiding in the selection of instructional materials; workshops; and assisting resource teachers in their diagnostic and corrective procedures. The major thrust, however, was the in-class visit based directly on the expressed need of the teacher.

To assess the benefits of the project, measures of pupil performance in specific areas of language arts were obtained through pre- and post-tests of the Stanford Achievement Tests. The areas were reading (word and paragraph meaning), spelling, word study skills, and language. All children at grades one, three and five were tested. At the same time, in an adjacent school district children in these grades were also pre- and post-tested with the same tests.

When the scores of the Stanford Achievements Tests were compared, there were no significant changes in pupil achievement in any of the areas tested within the district or from one school district to the other.

The evaluation by the teachers consisted of an open-ended written questionnaire which covered, among other information, the following: number of workshops attended, number of supervisory visits received with evaluation of each; aspects of the project which should be continued and those which needed improvement.

The teachers' opinions indicated that the project was valuable to them and they wished it to continue. Whether the teachers had attended one or more workshops, the response was similar: the workshops were interesting, but it was the help in the individual classrooms which was most valuable. In their opinion, the one aspect of the project which needed improvement was the frequency and duration of the supervisory visits. Though each teacher did have a minimum of three visits, it was felt these were not enough.

The administrators' assessment was compiled into a single report by the district's assistant-superintendent and included such information as impact of the supervisor upon the teachers and the interrelationship of the different supervisory services in the district.

In their assessment, the administrators regarded the project as most worthwhile and the major strength was in the "effective tie-in of follow-up supervision with periodic ... workshop sessions" (4). They concurred with the teachers' reports that the in-class supervision periods were most helpful but too brief and too few.

The following year, the supervisor was involved in a project undertaken to assess the effectiveness of a trained supervisor upon a group of student teachers in one large urban elementary school. The project was conducted for a year. The

entire supervisory cycle from pre- to post-observation conferences was practised with each student-teacher during each of the 10 visits throughout the year.

In this program, the pre-observation conference saw the supervisor and student-teacher examine proposed objectives and procedures for the forthcoming reading activity with the pupils. This examination involved discussion of the pupils' entering behavior, the way in which their behavior was to be affected, the main teaching strategy and its reinforcement techniques, and methods of evaluation. As a result of this discussion agreement was reached on observing a few salient points selected by the student-teacher according to his estimate of his needs at that moment. During the observation of the activity, the supervisor collected data as decided at the Pre-Observation Conference, while the classroom teacher collected general information. The supervisor's analysis and strategy for the Post-Observation Conference were held immediately after the observed teaching activity but outside the classroom. At the Post-Observation Conference, which was also held during class hours but away from the class, data gathered during the observation period were discussed, with the classroom teacher providing the proper context. Through such a series of supervisory conferences, the student-teacher was able to gain experience in the various facets of the reading program and in the ability to plan, conduct and evaluate his own instructional procedures in reading.

Assessment of this project was in the form of a taped discussion of all participants involved: principal, classroom teachers, student-teachers and supervisor. All agreed that this type of supervision was most beneficial to all concerned, including the classroom teachers, who felt they now could analyze more effectively their own teaching of reading.

IMPLICATIONS

The feedback from these two school situations indicates certain implications for the training of reading supervisors: (1) Supervision is effective if a

series of supervisory conferences are conducted wherein the supervisor helps the teacher search for common goals and then assists him in the gradual progress towards these goals. The supervisor must be trained in a system of communication which includes soliciting and accepting teachers' comments, ideas and suggestions, and being ready to offer remedies when asked. (2) Supervision is effective if the teaching episode is observed and analyzed according to the teacher's declared needs. The supervisor must be trained in the analysis of teaching and in the effective use of interpersonal skills to facilitate desired changes in the teacher's instructional behavior. (3) Supervision is effective if time is allocated for the supervisory conferences. The supervisor must be trained to work with the administration of the school in scheduling series of conferences, and must be prepared to work with teachers before and after the class is in session.

The foregoing description is not intended to show that this method of developing a reading supervisor is superior to another. Rather it demonstrates the importance of integrating three basic components of supervison through training: skills, structure and sensitivity. The skills derived from knowledge in the field of specialization are interwoven with a system of training permitting one to actually feel the stresses inherent within each role in a given supervisory situation. Having experienced these stresses under simulated conditions as described here, one becomes aware of the different perceptions acquired depending on whether one is supervising or being supervised.

It is not to be interpreted that these components could not be or are not being developed and practised as one actually supervises in the field. Instead, the program as presented here is offered as an alternative to the current trial and error kind of self-training one undergoes when supervising. Not only does this program develop certain awarenesses in advance, thus avoiding unpleasant situations which are occurring too often between supervisor and teacher, but it

appears to have the potential of promoting a mutual trust and concern necessary for the improvement of pupils' reading performance.

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